

## Interactional (In)Justice: The Sacred and the Profane

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*HE TAKES GREAT PLEASURE in belittling me and publicly ridiculing me. He blames me for his mistakes . . . accuses me of things I never did nor was responsible for. He takes great pride that he treats everybody equally . . . that is, cruelly. I have my dignity . . . I am a human being, for God's sakes. And, if I experience one more indignity from him, he no longer will be a human being!*

—Product Manager of telecommunications company

*EVERY MAN IS TO BE RESPECTED as an absolute end in himself; and it is a crime against the dignity that belongs to him as a human being, to use him as a mere means for some external purpose.*

—Immanuel Kant

OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS, I have interviewed and surveyed hundreds, if not thousands, of working people about their experiences of injustice. After analyzing the data, I have concluded that our models of organizational

justice are incomplete and inadequate. As researchers, our efforts have been primarily dedicated to the precise measurement of "perceptions" and "judgments" of justice, as if we are "intuitive philosophers" attempting to define "objective" concepts of justice (Bies, 1987). I am not belittling those efforts, nor am I suggesting that those efforts have been misguided. To the contrary, we need better construct validity and measurement of organizational justice variables. For, as Greenberg (1990c) has correctly admonished us, the sloppy and ad hoc measurement of our theoretical constructs has imposed serious limitations on our understanding of organizational justice.

At the same time, there is clearly more to justice than cognitive perceptions and judgments (Bies, 1987; Cahn, 1949; Solomon, 1990). The truth is that, as illustrated in the introductory quotation, when people talk about justice, their narratives are in terms of the injustices they experience (Shreve & Shreve, 1997) and, in particular, in terms of mistreatment they receive from another person—concerns that I have referred to as *interactional justice* (Bies, 1987; Bies & Moag, 1986). In these stories, interactional injustice is described as a "hot and burning" experience (Bies & Tripp, 2000; Mikula, 1986). The intense and personal pain associated with interactional injustice is experienced as a profound harm to one's psyche and identity (Bies & Tripp, 1996)—that is, one's sense of self. It is the human and existential dimensions to this harm that are underemphasized and underappreciated in organizational justice theory.

In this chapter I reexamine the construct of interactional justice and its development from the moment of "birth" to its current "adolescent" stage. I outline the controversy surrounding its conceptual status and identity. In addition, I review the empirical evidence assessing the distinction between interactional justice and procedural justice.

From this analysis, two conclusions emerge. First, *people can and do distinguish interactional justice from procedural justice*. A growing number of studies demonstrate that interactional justice and procedural justice are associated with different organizational behavior variables. The evidence for this conclusion is consistent and supportive.

Second, *people possess a view of the self as "sacred," and a violation of that sacred self arouses the sense of injustice*. I will argue that researchers can gain a deeper insight into justice by listening to and analyzing people's narratives of injustice (Shreve & Shreve, 1997). More specifically, if we begin our analysis by examining the events or incidents arousing the sense

Although I take full responsibility for the ideas in this chapter, justice requires that I acknowledge the constructive criticisms and suggestions of Tom Tripp, Dan McAllister, Susan Bies—and, of course, the two editors of this volume.

of *injustice*, then we can generate a more complete understanding of justice dynamics. Therefore, I find it useful to refer to concerns about interpersonal treatment as interactional (in)justice.

I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the movement of organizational justice theory into its "adulthood" stage. Evidence of this intellectual growth is found in the growing scholarly appreciation of the complexities and paradoxes of organizational justice. I argue that this intellectual growth also carries moral responsibilities for us as researchers, responsibilities that require us to be more "critical" of our research objectives.

## The Birth of a Construct: The Search for Identity

Just a decade ago, I went forth boldly to proclaim that procedural justice theory and research did not capture the breadth of people's concerns about a "fair process" (Bies & Moag, 1986). In particular, I argued that, while people are clearly concerned about the formal procedures used in a decision-making process (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), they are also concerned about the interpersonal treatment they receive from another person. I referred to these concerns as *interactional justice*.

This justice construct, however, did not come from out of the blue—it had its roots in my basement office located in the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University. Almost two decades ago, I wrote a dissertation proposal entitled, "Injustice: A Valuation Framework." That proposal began with the sentence: "Through a variety of mediums, organizations convey how much they 'value their members.'" Of particular importance, I continued, are those mediums that are "interpersonal in nature," and "the undervaluing or unjust treatment of an interpersonal nature may be the primary target of an individual's anger and discontent in an organizational setting." Although I had great passion for that proposal and the ideas embedded in it, I could not persuade my dissertation committee (Joanne Martin, Gene Webb, and Hal Leavitt) or other faculty I respected greatly (for example, Jeff Pfeffer) of the "value-added" nature of my ideas. Thus, like many Ph.D. students, I watched my dissertation proposal go down in flames—and it was the proper fate at the time.

Even though my initial dissertation proposal "died," my passion for the ideas in the proposal did not. Five years later, the core ideas in my initial proposal were resurrected and found new life in a paper that I presented in 1985 at the Research in Negotiation in Organizations Conference held at Duke University. Now armed with data and a little more intellectual maturity, I introduced the topic of "interactional justice" to a collegial group of skeptical scholars. Although the conference participants were

relatively open-minded about my ideas, I found little groundswell of support for *another* type of justice. In fact, most people tried to persuade me that I was just articulating another facet of procedural justice. (This paper was published in 1986 in the *Research on Negotiation in Organizations* series; Bies & Moag, 1986.)

Despite this initial lukewarm response to the construct of interactional justice, I persevered. Through the encouragement and support of Larry Cummings, I was provided another opportunity to "showcase" interactional justice in my chapter, "The Predicament of Injustice: The Management of Moral Outrage," which was published in 1987 in the *Research in Organizational Behavior* series. In this chapter I focused on the importance of social accounts, or explanations, as an interpersonal strategy to manage perceptions of organizational justice. This chapter generated more conceptual interest in the study of social accounts and organizational justice (for example, Greenberg, 1990b).

With these two publications, interest in, and empirical research on, interactional justice took off. Interactional justice has been found to be an important variable for understanding a variety of worker attitudes and behaviors in response to job layoffs (Bies, Martin, & Brockner, 1993; Bennett, Martin, Bies, & Brockner, 1995), budget decisions (Bies & Shapiro, 1987; Bies, Shapiro, & Cummings, 1988), purchase decisions (Bies & Shapiro, 1987), negotiation tactics (Daly, 1991; Shapiro & Bies, 1994), corporate recruitment practices (Bies & Moag, 1986; Bies & Shapiro, 1988), customer service practices (Clemmer, 1993), market exploitation practices (Bies, Tripp, & Neale, 1993), and abusive bosses (Bies & Tripp, 1995, in press; Hornstein, 1996).

In addition, interactional justice has been an important variable for understanding organizational citizenship behaviors (Moorman, 1991), trust in management and organizational commitment (Barling & Phillips, 1993), supervisor legitimacy (Masterson, Lewis-McClellan, Goldman, & Taylor, 1997), acceptance of a worksite smoking ban (Greenberg, 1994), revenge (Bies & Tripp, 1996; McLean Parks, 1997; Tripp & Bies, 1997), employee theft (Greenberg, 1990a, 1997), employee litigation behavior (Bies & Tyler, 1993), consumer complaint behavior (Blodgett, Hill, & Tax, 1997), citizen encounters with the police and courts (Tyler, 1988), and workplace privacy concerns (Bies, 1993, 1996).

After the "coming out" of interactional justice, there emerged related theory-building efforts that also highlighted the importance of interpersonal treatment in an analysis of justice. For example, in the group-value model of procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988) and the relational model of authority (Huo & Tyler, Chapter 7; Tyler & Lind, 1992), a key variable

is *standing*, which shares conceptual properties with my construct, interactional justice. Indeed, when one examines the operationalization of standing by researchers (e.g., Tyler, 1990), standing is equivalent to my construct of interactional justice. Similarly, in an underappreciated conceptual analysis, Greenberg (1993b) proposed a conceptual framework for analyzing justice, one that explicitly recognized the importance of interpersonal determinants of organizational justice.

In these parallel efforts, however, Lind, Tyler, and Greenberg view interactional justice not as a separate construct but rather as an interpersonal or social dimension of procedural justice. Therein lie the seeds of controversy. Specifically, the controversy is over whether interactional justice is a separate form of justice (Bies & Moag, 1986; Bies, 1987), or an interpersonal component of procedural justice (Cropanzano & Randall, 1993; Folger & Bies, 1989; Greenberg, 1990c; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, 1992; Tyler & Bies, 1990; Tyler & Lind, 1992), or a social dimension of both distributive and procedural justice (Greenberg, 1993b).

If we are to advance our understanding of justice processes and dynamics and build a unified theory of organizational justice, then we must, as Greenberg (1990c, 1996) wisely reminds us, bring some clarity to this conceptual confusion. In the next section, I examine the conceptual controversy surrounding interactional justice. In addition, I review the relevant empirical evidence assessing the distinction between interactional justice and procedural justice.

### "Ball of Confusion": Striving for Conceptual Clarity

In my initial theorizing (Bies, 1987; Bies & Moag, 1986), I conceptualized interactional justice as a third form of justice, separate from distributive and procedural justice. More specifically, I argued that interactional justice referred to people's concerns about "the quality of interpersonal treatment they receive during the enactment of organizational procedures" (Bies & Moag, 1986, p. 44). Clearly, my focus was on interpersonal treatment, thus making it separate from procedural justice as then defined in the literature. But because I embedded the analysis of interactional justice in the context of a decision-making process, one could view interactional concerns as another component of procedural justice—thus, the beginning of the confusion.

The fundamental debate in the controversy is over the relationship between interactional justice and procedural justice. The conventional wisdom that has emerged from the debate is best articulated by Greenberg

and colleagues (1993b; Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997). Although noting the importance of interpersonal determinants of justice, Cropanzano and Greenberg (1997) argue that interactional justice "became increasingly difficult to distinguish from structural procedural justice. For one thing, both the formal procedures and the interpersonal interactions jointly comprise the process that leads to an allocation decision. Additionally, interactional and structural procedural justice had similar consequences and correlates . . . (and were) highly related to one another" (p. 330).

But let us take another look at the three studies cited by Cropanzano and Greenberg (1997), which was their evidence to support the argument that we should view interactional justice as a social dimension of procedural justice. There were Clemmer (1993), Konovsky and Cropanzano (1991), and Koper, Van Knippenberg, Bouhuijs, Vermunt, and Wilke (1993). In Clemmer's (1993) study of fairness and customer satisfaction with services, she found similar correlates and consequences for procedural justice and interactional justice, as suggested by Cropanzano and Greenberg (1997). But Clemmer also found that procedural justice and interactional justice "each contributed uniquely to customers' satisfaction" (p. 202). Further, she reported that "the sorting process in the qualitative phase also supports separating the two constructs" (p. 202).

In their study of drug testing fairness, Konovsky and Cropanzano (1991) report a .62 correlation between procedural justice and interactional justice. Although that is a high correlation, they also reported a .53 correlation between procedural justice and distributive justice—and there was no call for integrating procedural justice and distributive justice. Further, the operationalization of interactional justice by Konovsky and Cropanzano, in the form of explanations, is a narrow and limited view of interactional justice. Finally, even with the problems with their narrow operationalization of interactional justice, the explanation variable was significantly related to affective commitment, along with procedural justice—but interactional justice was uniquely related to job satisfaction, whereas there was no significant relationship for procedural justice.

In two experiments designed to examine the relationship between procedural fairness and self-esteem, Koper et al. (1993) found a significant correlation between interactional justice and procedural justice ( $r = .77$  in Study 1,  $r = .56$  in Study 2), as suggested by Cropanzano and Greenberg. But, as in the Konovsky and Cropanzano study, procedural justice and distributive justice were also significantly correlated ( $r = .58$  in Study 1,  $r = .19$ , *n.s.* in Study 2). Importantly, interactional justice was significantly

related to self-esteem in both experiments, whereas procedural justice was significantly related to self-esteem only in Study 1.

Although the findings from these three investigations may not be conclusive with respect to the distinctiveness of interactional justice, they do not necessarily support a view of integrating interactional justice with procedural justice. To assess the distinctiveness of interactional justice, we need to move beyond debating alternative interpretations of empirical findings. For guidance in how to proceed analytically, I turn to Greenberg's (1990c) important conceptual analysis of organizational justice.

Greenberg (1990c) outlined a two-stage analysis for determining whether there is a meaningful distinction between different justice constructs. In the first stage, following Greenberg's logic, we need to examine studies that have empirically differentiated procedural justice and interactional justice. In the second stage, we must determine whether there are different classes of dependent variables associated with procedural justice and interactional justice.

### *Assessing the Distinction between Procedural Justice and Interactional Justice*

Following Greenberg (1990c), we need to establish that the distinction between procedural justice and interactional justice "is not simply a theoretical heuristic but rather a real one from the perspective of the worker's phenomenology" (p. 404) and "to determine whether employees are intuitively aware of the distinction" (p. 405). As mentioned earlier, Clemmer (1993) reported evidence supporting the separation of interactional justice and procedural justice in her study of customer service. Four additional investigations have addressed this issue (Bies & Tripp, 1996; Messick Bloom, Boldizar, & Samuelson, 1985; Mikula, 1986; Mikula, Petri, & Tanzer, 1990).

#### **EMPIRICALLY ESTABLISHING THE BASIS FOR THE DISTINCTION**

Mikula (1986) asked subjects to describe an unjust event that they had actually experienced as a victim. The social settings in which the unjust events occurred varied (e.g., school, family, friends, dealing with authorities). Many of the events identified were consistent with concepts of distributive injustice (e.g., unfair grade) and procedural injustice (e.g., ruthless use of one's high status and power). But, there were also injustice-arousing events identified that were neither distributive or procedural but interactional in nature. These events centered around the fairness of

everyday interactions and encounters (e.g., unjustified accusation and blaming, betrayal of confidence).

Messick et al. (1985) found a pattern of findings similar to Mikula (1986). Messick et al. asked their subjects to write lists of fair and unfair things that they or others did. The examples collected were of just and unjust events in general without specifying any social setting. Again, there were clear distributive and procedural events identified, but also identified was a separate category that dealt specifically with the quality of interpersonal treatment independent of procedure and outcome.

Mikula et al. (1990) collected 280 descriptions of unjust events from various student samples using different methodologies. As with Mikula (1986) and Messick et al. (1985), Mikula et al. reported a proportion of events that did not focus on distributive or procedural issues; indeed, several of the events identified focused on the quality of interpersonal treatment people received in a variety of interactions and encounters. Examples of such interpersonal treatment include disregarding the feelings and needs of others, reproach or accusation, and abusive or aggressive treatment.

Finally, in a study of revenge in organizations, Bies and Tripp (1996) surveyed 90 MBA students, who had significant work experience, about events that provoked thoughts and feelings of revenge. Consistent with the studies reviewed earlier, respondents in this study reported revenge-provoking events that were clearly distributive (e.g., shirking job responsibilities, stealing credit for ideas from others) and procedural (e.g., violation of the formal rules, changing the rules "after the fact") in nature. But, again, events that centered on the quality of interpersonal treatment were identified (for example, disclosure of private confidences and secrets, and wrong or unfair accusations).

Taken together, the findings from these four studies, along with the results from Clemmer (1993), strongly indicate that people are aware of both procedural and interactional elements of fairness. The ability of people to distinguish between the different elements, although important, is insufficient evidence to make the case for the distinctiveness of interactional justice. In addition, we must demonstrate that procedural justice and interactional justice relate to different organizational variables.

**JUSTICE-BASED PREDICTORS OF ORGANIZATIONAL VARIABLES** Following Greenberg's logic (1990c), the next stage of analysis is to consider how procedural justice and interactional justice relate to a variety of organizational variables. Five investigations address this issue (Barling & Phillips, 1993; Blodgett et al., 1997; Malatesta & Byrne, 1997; Masterson et al., 1997; Moorman, 1991; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997).

In a survey study of employees in two medium-sized companies, Moorman (1991) examined the relationship between perceptions of three types of justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional) and organizational citizenship behaviors. Empirical support was found for a causal relationship between perceptions of organizational justice and organizational citizenship behaviors. However, in a closer examination of the justice to citizenship behaviors relationship, Moorman found differential effects due to distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. Specifically, it was *only* interactional justice that was significantly related to citizenship behavior.

In a vignette study, Barling and Phillips (1993) investigated the different effects of the three types of justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional) on three outcomes associated with reactions to pay cuts (e.g., withdrawal, trust in management, affective commitment). The results of the data analysis uncovered significant main effects of interactional justice on all three outcomes, whereas procedural justice had a main effect only on the trust in management, and distributive justice had no significant effect on any of the variables.

In two survey studies, Masterson et al. (1997) examined the differential effects of procedural justice and interactional justice on work relationships and outcomes. In Study 1, Masterson et al. surveyed 153 administrative and staff employees during the pilot-testing of a new performance-management system at a large public university in the northeastern United States. Three organizational outcomes were measured (performance appraisal satisfaction, turnover intentions, and organizational commitment), and two supervisory-focused outcomes were measured (supervisor legitimacy and supervisor satisfaction). Consistent with their predictions, Masterson et al. found employees' procedural justice perceptions were significantly related to each of the three organizational outcomes but not related significantly to either of the supervisory-focused outcomes; in addition, interactional justice was significantly related to only one of the organizational outcomes (turnover intentions) but significantly related to both of the supervisory-focused outcomes.

In Study 2, Masterson et al. surveyed 651 employees and supervisors during the full-scale implementation of the new performance-management system at the same large public university in the northeastern United States. Masterson et al. introduced a new supervisory-focused variable, leader-member exchange, and a new organization-focused variable, perceived organizational support. As in Study 1, Masterson et al. found differential effects of interactional justice and procedural justice. Specifically, interactional justice affected directly and positively the perceived quality

of the leader-member exchange, while procedural justice affected directly and positively employees' perceived organizational support.

In a field study, Malatesta and Byrne (1997) examined the differential impact of formal procedures and interactional justice on organizational commitment, supervisory commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors. In this study, structural equations modeling was used to analyze data provided by 172 employee-supervisor dyads in a large, Midwestern university in the United States. Malatesta and Byrne found that the perception of fair formal procedures was related only to organizational commitment, whereas interactional justice was related to supervisory commitment and organizational citizenship behaviors.

In a field survey of 240 manufacturing employees, Skarlicki and Folger (1997) investigated the relationship between organizational justice and organizational retaliation behavior. In this study, they measured employee perceptions of distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice, each of which was used to predict organizational retaliation behavior. In a noteworthy methodological improvement, the assessment of organizational retaliation behavior was done by peers of the employees, not the employees themselves. Skarlicki and Folger found that retaliation was predicted by the three-way interaction among distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. Based on this finding, Skarlicki and Folger argue that "a statistical model allowing only for the test of main effects and two-way interactions (Distributive Justice  $\times$  Procedural Justice or Distributive Justice  $\times$  Interactional Justice) might run the risk of being misspecified" (p. 439). Indeed, they add "that cues about interpersonal sensitivity provide *unique* (emphasis added) information to individuals when deciding whether to get even for low outcomes" (p. 439).

In a scenario study, Blodgett et al. (1997) investigated the effects of different levels of distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice on consumer complaint behavior. The scenario involved a consumer attempting to return a product to a retail store. Blodgett et al. found that consumers who experienced higher levels of either distributive justice or interactional justice were predicted to be more likely to repatronize the retailer and less likely to "badmouth" the retailer. Procedural justice had no effect on postcomplaint behavior. As a key finding, interactional justice explained a significantly greater percentage of the variance of postcomplaint behavior than did distributive justice.

Taken together, these studies make a strong case for the relative roles of procedural justice and interactional justice. One emerging finding is that interactional justice perceptions tend to be associated with *direct supervisor evaluations* whereas procedural justice perceptions tend to be associ-

ated with *organizational system evaluations*. In addition to that finding, there is consistent evidence that interactional justice and procedural justice affect organizational behavior variables differently.

### Summary and Punctuation

A variety of empirical studies demonstrate that (a) people can and do distinguish the fairness of formal procedures from the fairness of interpersonal treatment; and (b) interactional justice and procedural justice affect different worker attitudes and behaviors. As such, researchers have much to gain by maintaining the conceptual distinction, for that is what the people do as they experience their work life.

To hold on to an "umbrella" concept of procedural justice—one that covers both structural and interpersonal concerns—not only muddies the conceptual waters but it also lacks parsimony. If we are to advance our understanding of justice processes and dynamics, then parsimony is clearly an important conceptual objective (Greenberg, 1990c, 1996). Thus, given the empirical evidence, it makes theoretical and analytical sense to maintain the distinction between interactional justice and procedural justice.

Maintaining this important and parsimonious conceptual distinction carries important implications for research on interactional justice and procedural justice. For example, at a minimum, we need to be more precise in measuring interactional justice and procedural justice (Greenberg, 1990c). Specifically, interactional justice should include only items that focus on interpersonal treatment, while evaluations of formal procedures and their enactment should be the focus of procedural justice (for example, Folger & Konovsky, 1989). Further, an operationalization of interactional justice should not be limited to one aspect, such as social accounts (for example, Konovsky & Cropanzano, 1991), but should also include a broader range of items reflecting the richness of the construct (for example, Moorman, 1991).

To continue this line of reasoning, the evidence reviewed suggests strongly that current models of organizational justice that incorporate both interpersonal and formal procedure variables, as part of an umbrella procedural justice construct (for example, Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992), should separate, at least for analytical purposes, the potential differential effects due to the interpersonal and formal procedure variables. Indeed, it may be that the procedural justice findings in previous studies are due more to concerns about interpersonal treatment than to the characteristics of formal procedures. To that extent, we should reexamine

procedural justice studies to pinpoint what accounted for the significance of the findings reported.

In all fairness, I am not the first justice researcher to advance this argument. A similar argument was articulated by Mikula et al. (1990) when they analyzed the controversy over status of interactional justice relative to procedural justice. Because their work may not be familiar to all of us, their words bear repeating. Specifically, Mikula et al. (1990) wrote:

Bies and Moag (1986) proposed analysing the quality of interpersonal treatment as an independent form of justice in addition to justice of distributions and procedures. Lind and Tyler (1988), on the other hand, suggested regarding as a component of procedural justice. It strikes us that both viewpoints are equally reasonable as long as one focuses exclusively on social situations of judgement and decision-making (e.g. allocation decisions, conflict management, performance appraisal, corporate recruiting activities, etc.)—as the majority of justice research has done in the past. In these cases, interpersonal treatment relates mostly to the enactment of procedures. However, the results of the present and the Messick et al (1985) studies suggest a broader concept of interpersonal treatment which goes beyond situations of judgement and decision-making and includes all kinds of interactions and encounters. If one agrees to such a broad concept, it seems better to regard the manner of interpersonal treatment as an independent subject of justice evaluations rather than to subsume it under the concept of procedure. Otherwise, this latter concept, which usually denotes processes of judgement and decision-making, would be inflated and therefore lose its usefulness. In addition, it would be difficult and even impossible to distinguish between processes of decision-making and the interpersonal treatment by decision makers, both of which can become subjects of justice judgements independent of each other. (p. 143)

As a punctuation to this section, let me state what the evidence makes clear: *interactional (in)justice matters to people*. People are concerned about the interpersonal treatment they receive from others. Further, these interactional concerns are distinguishable from procedural concerns.

But, if the debate over the distinctiveness of interactional justice continues, even as the empirical evidence demonstrating its distinctiveness grows, one will be left to ponder why. Could it be that the continuing debate is the result of “normal scientists” trying to make sense of anomalous findings that do not neatly fit within the procedural justice paradigm? Or could it be the “politics of the paradigm,” where those with vested interests are motivated to preserve the procedural justice paradigm? Even though determining which of those answers is more “true” will not

be “easy,” it is absolutely critical to determine which one is a more valid explanation if we are to build a unified theory of organizational justice. In the spirit of advancing our understanding of organizational justice, I now turn my attention to a more fine-grained analysis of specific interactional justice concerns.

## Interactional (In)Justice: From the Profane to the Sacred

From my own research and the other evidence reviewed in this chapter, it is becoming clearer to me that, to fully appreciate the richness of justice dynamics in organizations, one must understand the events that arouse the sense of injustice (Bies, 1987; Bies, Tripp, & Kramer, 1997). The influential legal theorist, Edmond Cahn (1949), articulates this perspective more eloquently in his seminal book, *The Sense of Injustice*. In the book, Cahn poses the question: “Why do we speak of the ‘sense of injustice’ rather than the ‘sense of justice’?” (p. 13). He responds with the answer: “Because ‘justice’ has been so beclouded by natural-law writings that it almost inevitably brings to mind some ideal relation or static condition or set of perceptual standards, while we are concerned, on the contrary, with what is active, vital, and experiential in the reactions of human beings” (p. 13). Cahn (1949) defines the sense of injustice as “the sympathetic reaction of outrage, horror, shock, resentment, and anger, those affections of the viscera and abnormal secretions of the adrenals that prepare the human animal to resist attack. Nature has thus equipped all men to regard injustice to another as personal aggression” (p. 24).

Embedded in Cahn’s analysis is the assumption that people view the self as sacred. In particular, this sense of sacredness assumes an “involute personality . . . (and) the individual’s independence, dignity and integrity” (Bloustein, 1964, p. 971). Following Cahn, to define the boundaries of the sacred self, we must examine the profanities that violate it.

My own research (for example, Bies & Moag, 1986, and Bies & Tripp, 1996) and that of others (for example, Mikula, 1986; Mikula et al. 1990) identify a variety of interpersonal profanities that can shed light on the boundaries of the sacred self. As one important category of profanities, people are concerned about *derogatory judgments* made about themselves by others, which in a justice context refers to the truthfulness and accuracy of statements and judgments about a person. A second and related category of profanities involves *deception*, which in a justice context refers to the correspondence between one’s words and actions. As a third category of profanities, people are concerned with the *invasion of privacy*,

which in a justice context refers to the legitimacy of disclosing of personal information about one person to another. A fourth category of profanities involves *disrespect*, which in a justice context refers to the signs and symbols conveying respect for the intrinsic value or worth of the individual.

### Derogatory Judgments

The integrity of one's self-identity, particularly as it is communicated to other audiences, is a central aspect of the self-system (Steele, 1988). As a result, a wrongful accusation or a false and derogatory statement about a person should arouse the sense of injustice (Bies & Tripp, 1993). Several studies support this line of reasoning.

One frequently mentioned profanity is a *wrongful or unfair accusation* about one's work performance (Bies & Tripp, 1996, in press; Mikula, 1986; Mikula et al., 1990). In the Bies and Tripp (1996) study, one person recounted being accused of stealing ideas by a boss, yet it was the boss who had stolen the ideas! An unfair accusation is similar to a wrongful accusation in that both accusations are not true. But for many people, an unfair accusation typically reflected a "gross misrepresentation of the facts," rather than "I did not do it," as in the case of a wrongful accusation. An example of an unfair accusation involved a boss who blamed her team for failure even though the team had done its best despite some "questionable" decisions by the boss (Bies & Tripp, 1996). With either accusation, there was a feeling by the victim of being "discredited" and that these accusations "did not do justice" to them (Bies & Tripp, 1996).

Unfair attacks on one's identity also occur when one engages in "*bad-mouthing*" another. For example, a peer who "talks behind one's back," thus creating an unfavorable image of another, is perceived as wrong and unjust (Mikula et al., 1990). Similarly, people report an interactional injustice when a boss *uses pejorative labels* (for example, a "troublemaker" or a "traitor") to stigmatize a subordinate (Bies & Tripp, in press).

### Deception

Expectations of honesty and fulfilled promises in dealings with others is a foundation of trust in a relationship (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1997). Trusting another person leaves one vulnerable in the relationship (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995), as it exposes the sacred self. If that vulnerability is misused, as when people are deceived, it should arouse the sense of injustice (Bies & Tripp, 1996). Several studies support this line of reasoning.

Bies and Moag (1986) found job candidates angry and resentful at recruiters who *lied* to them. Bies and Tripp (1996) also found evidence that lying triggered feelings of outrage. One example of lying involved a boss stating that a subordinate would receive a raise when, in fact, no raise was forthcoming. In the face of being lied to, the typical reaction by people is that they have been "duped" and "manipulated" (Bies & Tripp, 1996; Mikula et al., 1990) and are unable to trust the perpetrator again.

As another form of deception, a *broken promise* can make people angry and resentful (Bies & Tripp, 1996, in press; Mikula, 1986; Mikula et al., 1990; Tripp & Bies, 1997). Respondents in the Bies and Tripp (1996) study identified broken promises as evoking feelings of outrage. As one example, a person received a promise from a co-worker friend to "help out" at a difficult client meeting, yet the co-worker "backed out" at the last minute with no explanation. In another example from Bies and Tripp (1996), a boss made explicit promises to support a subordinate's candidacy for a promotion in a management meeting determining such moves but did not do so. In response to that broken promise, the subordinate stated, "My boss's word means nothing, absolutely. I'll never trust him again" (p. 250).

### Invasion of Privacy

Research on privacy (Stone & Stone, 1990) and self-disclosure (Derlega & Berg, 1987; Jourard, 1966) make it clear that people have a part of themselves that they want kept hidden or private from others. When the "hidden self" (Bies, 1996) is invaded, the violation should arouse the sense of injustice. Several studies have support this line of reasoning.

The *disclosure of confidences and secrets* is a common form of invasion of privacy in organizations (Bies & Tripp, 1996) and everyday life (Mikula, 1986; Mikula et al., 1990). Bies and Tripp (1996) report that regardless of whether it be disclosing a subordinate's private matter that was supposed to be held in confidence by the boss or a co-worker who received secret information disclosed by another but used it to his own advantage—such an action was viewed as a "fundamental betrayal" and "a knife in the back," resulting in what one person described as "not just a splintering, but a shattering of trust" (p. 251).

Research on privacy suggests a similar response to the unwarranted disclosure of personal information (Bies, 1993, 1996). For example, Woodman, Ganster, Adams, McCuddy, Tolchinsky, and Fromkin (1982) and Tolchinsky, McCuddy, Adams, Ganster, Woodman and Fromkin (1981) found that employees were much more concerned about the disclosure of

personal information to parties outside the organization than about disclosure of the same information for internal uses of the organization. However, when people give permission for disclosure of information, then the sense of injustice is less likely aroused (Fusiler & Hoyer, 1980; Tolchinsky et al., 1981).

The *asking of improper questions* is also viewed as an invasion of privacy. For example, in a study of corporate recruiting practices, Bies and Moag (1986) found that respondents were very upset with questions about marital status or whether the job candidate was thinking about having children.

Finally, the *use of "spies"* is also viewed as invasion of privacy and unfair. For example, in a study of abusive bosses, Bies and Tripp (in press) found that people were particularly concerned about bosses who, in almost 1984-like fashion, demanded that employees act as "snitches" to bring gossip and rumors about other employees. In addition, respondents were particularly appalled by bosses who would use secretaries as "spies" to ferret out the disloyal.

## Disrespect

At a fundamental level, the quality of the interpersonal treatment accorded by one person to another can have an impact on one's self-identity (Steele, 1988). When that interpersonal treatment conveys disrespect, it should arouse the sense of injustice (Bies & Moag, 1986; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Several studies support this line of reasoning and identify a variety of forms of disrespect: *inconsiderate actions*, *abusive words or actions*, and *coercion*.

**INCONSIDERATE ACTIONS** On a fundamental level, people have minimal expectations for considerate treatment as core to their concerns of interactional justice (Bies & Moag, 1986; Tyler & Bies, 1990). In a work setting, one important sign of respect to the dignity of the person is *timely feedback* (Bies & Moag, 1986). When people have to wait for a response an undue amount of time, they feel unfairly treated. Similarly, people expect to *receive an explanation or account* of decisions made that affect them, and, when they fail to receive such information, they feel unfairly treated (Bies, 1987; Bies & Moag, 1986).

**ABUSIVE WORDS OR ACTIONS** What people say or do and the manner in which they do it (e.g., abusively) can signal disrespect, thus arousing the sense of injustice (Bies & Tripp, 1996, in press; Mikula et al., 1990). One

example of such disrespect is *rudeness* (Bies & Moag, 1986; Katz, Gutek, Kahn & Barton, 1975; Mikula et al., 1990). For example, Bies and Moag (1986) found job candidates angry and resentful at interviewers who would interrupt their answers to questions or take phone calls in the middle of the interview. Similarly, in a study of service agency clients, Katz et al. (1975) found that clients were angry and resentful at bureaucratic officials who were impolite and rude.

The practice of *publicly criticizing and berating people in public* has also been identified as a form of using abusive words and actions in a manner that can arouse the sense of injustice (Baron, 1988; Bies & Tripp, 1996, in press; Hornstein, 1996). This is particularly true in the case of the boss-subordinate relationship. For example, in a study of abusive bosses (Bies & Tripp, in press), one manager reported that his boss had a "Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde" personality. This meant that in one moment the boss could be very calm, peaceful, and satisfied, but then, without any warning, the boss would erupt into a loud, angry, temper tantrum, a public tirade directed at one or all employees. Indeed, these tirades occurred for no apparent reason.

Bies and Tripp (in press) also report that these tirades are not limited to emotional outbursts but often include the destruction of physical property (e.g., throwing telephones at the wall) or threatening, and occasionally even using, physical violence (e.g., shoving an employee). Finally, what makes the mood swings even more difficult to endure is that they are often uncorrelated with subordinate behavior, meaning that both trivial and serious events may trigger the same emotional outburst.

Related to public criticism and beratement, abusive treatment may take the form of *actions intended to embarrass and humiliate a person publicly* (Bies & Tripp, 1996, in press; Glass & Singer, 1972; Mikula et al., 1990). For example, Glass and Singer (1972) reported the results of a laboratory study in which people felt unfairly treated when they were unduly embarrassed or humiliated by a "bureaucratic administrator" who acted in an arrogant manner. Bies and Tripp (in press) report about one boss who brought the whole department together and singled out one employee for poor performance in "harsh" and "angry" terms, even making "fun" of the employee's lack of skills and abilities. According to the employee, he felt he had "lost face" and felt "belittled and degraded" and "emotionally scarred" as a result of this attack.

*Prejudicial statements*, as in racist and sexist statements, convey disrespect, arousing the sense of injustice (Bies & Moag, 1986). Similarly, being the target of *insults* can arouse the sense of injustice (Bies & Tripp, 1996, in press). Insults on a personal level typically involved "name-calling," as

in questioning the person's intellectual capacities by referring to the employee as a "moron" or in challenging a male employee's lack of assertiveness by stating that he was a "wimp, probably had no balls." Insults to the collective involved sexist and racist remarks that were targeted at women and African-Americans (Bies & Tripp, 1996).

**COERCION** Research suggests that when management practices impose undue psychological or physical pain, such actions are viewed as unjust. For example, job candidates in the Bies and Moag (1986) study viewed "stress interviews" as unfair because of the psychological pain and physiological stress they experienced during those types of interactions with recruiters.

Bies and Tripp (in press) report examples of *duress* as interactional injustices. For example, one employee was told that he had to fire one of his own subordinates, even though that subordinate was a good performer. The boss, however, did not personally like that subordinate and implied that if the employee did not fire his subordinate, it might reflect adversely on his managerial capabilities and limit his future at the company. This employee—young and recently married with a newborn, thus feeling quite vulnerable—submitted and terminated the employee under duress, even though he knew it was wrong.

### Summary and Punctuation

Taken together, these studies suggest that people are concerned about a variety of interpersonal profanities and indignities. Moreover, consistent with the conclusion of Mikula et al. (1990), interactional justice concerns are not limited to *exchange* contexts, such as resource allocation and decision making; in addition, people are concerned about interpersonal treatment in their *everyday encounters* in organizations. The fact that interactional concerns transcend formal decision-making contexts is an important reason we should maintain the distinctiveness of interactional (in)justice.

But the evidence reviewed in this section suggests even another reason for maintaining the distinctiveness of interactional (in)justice. To wit, there are examples of injustice that I reviewed that are not easily captured by the current distributive-procedural distinction. For example, the injustice of coercion does not fit with distributive justice or procedural justice frameworks, yet it fits quite nicely within the interactional justice framework. In addition, concerns about invasion of privacy highlight the psychological importance of freedom (as does coercion, for that matter), and

freedom as a justice concern has not been the focus of distributive justice or procedural justice theories.

To punctuate this line of reasoning, interactional (in)justice matters to people, and *it matters in ways that are not parsimoniously explained by a simple distributive-procedural distinction*. If we take this body of evidence about interactional (in)justice seriously, as we should, then our theorizing about organizational justice must leave its "adolescence" stage of development (Greenberg, 1993a) and embark on the journey into intellectual "adulthood." Navigating such an intellectual journey is the focus of the next section.

## As Organizational Justice Comes of Age: Moving from Adolescence to Adulthood

Greenberg (1993a) noted that our understanding of organizational justice was in its formative stage, which he referred to as intellectual adolescence. Although I agree with this assessment, there is also growing evidence of an intellectual "growth spurt" in our understanding of organizational justice. For example, we are currently witnessing a growing appreciation by scholars of the *complexities and paradoxes of organizational justice*. Recent conceptual analyses exploring the multidimensional nature of justice (Greenberg, 1993b; Cropanzano & Ambrose, Chapter 4) highlight new complexities and paradoxes in the dynamics of justice.

The move into intellectual adulthood also carries important responsibilities. Specifically, we must *begin a moral discourse* about our research and its managerial implications. We, as justice researchers, must reflect on our responsibilities to conduct research that achieves not only "statistical" significance but also "moral" significance. To these issues I now turn my attention.

### The Complexities and Paradoxes of Justice

As one enters adulthood, one becomes more aware of life's complexities and paradoxes. Such understanding is also relevant to analysis of organizational justice. For example, as the essays in this volume demonstrate, simple explanations of organizational justice are giving way to more textured and nuanced analyses. In addition, we are becoming more aware of how the pursuit of organizational justice can create injustice for people (Bies & Sitkin, 1993; Sitkin & Bies, 1993)—which may be the *fundamental* justice paradox.

As another sign of the move into intellectual adulthood for organizational justice, there is increasing scholarly activity dedicated to making conceptual sense of the interrelationships among the different facets of organizational justice (distributive, procedural, and interactional). One noteworthy analysis is provided by Greenberg (1993b), who proposes a taxonomy of justice classes by highlighting the distinction between structural and social determinants of justice and their relationship to the two different categories of justice—distributive and procedural. In this taxonomy, Greenberg presents an insightful and creative framework for incorporating the important interpersonal determinants of organizational justice, while highlighting new classes of organizational justice concerns (for example, configural justice).

Another noteworthy example of conceptual creativity is provided by Cropanzano and Ambrose (this volume), who argue that the distinction between procedure and outcomes may not be fundamental and that procedural justice and distributive justice are different components of a more global concept, social justice. In taking this “monistic” perspective, Cropanzano and Ambrose demonstrate how an event can be a procedure in one setting and an outcome in another setting. Further, and of relevance to the study of interactional justice, they highlight how both procedures and outcomes can affect human dignity.

Although the analyses of Greenberg, Cropanzano, and Ambrose are quite insightful, there is another approach for exploring the complexities and paradoxes of organizational justice. In this approach, we begin with examining the fundamental meaning of justice. What justice fundamentally means is to give a person *his or her due*. But how that due is determined may vary. Feinberg (1974) argues that “in some cases one’s due is determined independently of that of other people, while in other cases, a person’s due is determinable *only* by reference to his relations to other persons . . . the contexts, criteria, and principles of the former kind (are referred to) as *noncomparative*, and those of the latter sort as *comparative*” (p. 297). This distinction between comparative and noncomparative principles represents an alternative, yet potentially useful, approach for exploring organizational justice and appreciating the interrelationships between its distributive, procedural, and interactional facets.

Take the case of comparative justice. Feinberg identifies “some typical occasions for comparative justice: (i) when competitive prizes are to be awarded, (ii) when burdens and benefits are to be distributed, and (iii) when general rules are to be made, administered, or enforced” (p. 280). “All comparative justice involves, in one way or another, equality in the treatment accorded all the members of a class; but whether that equality be ab-

solute or ‘proportional,’ whether it be equality of share, equality of opportunity, or equality of consideration, depends on the nature of the goods and evils awarded or distributed, and the nature of the class in which the assignments and allocations take place. Comparative injustice consists in arbitrary and invidious discrimination of one kind or another: a departure from the requisite form or equal treatment without good reason . . . And where the occasion for justice is the application or enforcement of general rules, comparative justice requires that the judge or administrator give precisely the same treatment to each person who falls within a class specified by the rule” (p. 281).

Principles of comparative justice underlie the research on distributive justice. For example, research inspired by equity theory (e.g., Adams, 1965; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978) and relative deprivation theory (e.g., Crosby, 1976; Martin, 1981) explicitly assumes that justice is determined through comparison with others. Comparative principles also underlie our models of procedural justice. Whether it be the opportunity for voice or process control (Thibaut & Walker, 1975) or the consistent application of different procedural rules (Leventhal, 1980) or the neutrality of the decision maker (Lind & Tyler, 1988), any deviation from equality of opportunity or the equality of administration of the rules forms the basis for claims of procedural injustice.

However, as Feinberg (1974) demonstrates, there is another class of principles, those that are noncomparative in nature, that can form and shape perceptions of justice and injustice. As Feinberg notes, “When our problem is to make assignments, ascriptions, or awards in accordance with noncomparative justice, what is ‘due’ the other person is not a share or portion of some divisible benefit or burden; hence it is not necessary for us to know what is due the other in order to know what is due the person with whom we are dealing. *His* rights-or-deserts alone determine what is due him; and once we have come to a judgment of *his* due, that judgment cannot be logically affected by subsequent knowledge of the condition of other parties. . . . When our task is to do noncomparative justice to each of a large number of individuals, we do not compare them with each other, but rather we compare each in turn with an objective standard and judge each (as we say) ‘on his merits’ ” (p. 282). Examples of such objective and absolute standards might include truth, freedom, and human dignity, concerns that are highlighted by my conceptualization of interactional (in)justice and related models of procedural justice (Tyler & Lind, 1992).

To further illustrate the difference between comparative and noncomparative principles, consider the following example taken from Bies

(1987). Let us assume there is a "rude and abusive" journal reviewer who makes caustic and derogatory remarks about five different manuscripts reviewed. Let us further assume that each manuscript was of equal quality. Given that the manuscript "inputs" were the same and the outcomes were the same, applying principles of comparative justice would suggest there should be no sense of injustice aroused as the result of this process.

Yet, for most of us, there would be some residual resentment or anger as the target of such treatment. The principles that would explain our sense of injustice would be noncomparative in nature. For example, we might have some conception that we have a *right* to be treated with respect and that no one deserves to be the target of such mean-spirited comments or insults. Further, if the reviewer made derogatory and false accusations about the work, one would feel unjustly treated because one had not been "done justice." Regardless of the fact that everyone else was treated in the same manner, it would not totally mitigate the sense of injustice aroused by the violation of noncomparative principles.

The focus on interactional (in)justice highlights the importance of noncomparative principles of justice, which are largely overlooked in our conceptualization of organizational justice. Moreover, as Feinberg (1974) demonstrates, any event or outcome may be evaluated by comparative and noncomparative principles. As a result, people may invoke both sets of justice principles, which provides a plausible and powerful explanation of another justice paradox. That is, people want to be treated "equally, but uniquely" (Bies, 1987; Folger, 1994).

The purpose of my discussion of comparative and noncomparative principles is not to suggest that Greenberg, Cropanzano, or Ambrose are "wrong" and that I am "right." To the contrary, my purpose is to highlight the multiple approaches for developing a more sophisticated understanding of organizational justice and its dynamics. Such sophistication, I believe, is more evidence of our move into intellectual adulthood. But that move also carries some new responsibilities, which I now address.

### *Beginning a Moral Discourse*

Bill Scott is a friend and scholar who has played a formative role in my thinking about justice. From the first moment I met him, Bill reminded me of the larger social and political context of justice. More specifically, justice is a concept invoked to legitimate existing governance structures (Scott, 1988). Moreover, Bill reminds me, justice researchers may be (un)wittingly supplying ideological support to management practices that

destroy individual freedom and dignity (Scott & Hart, 1979). As a result, Bill argues that we need to create a forum for moral discourse in which we critically examine our research and its use by managers (Scott & Hart, 1989).

In the spirit of Bill Scott, such a moral discourse must begin with an acknowledgment that our justice research has a decidedly *promanagement bias* (Bies & Tripp, 1998; Treviño & Bies, 1997). There is an instrumental orientation and ideology that permeates so much of justice theory and research, which has put us, as scholars, in the role of apologists for management. Indeed, we cry for "joy" when our justice variables can legitimate promanagement interests such as organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviors, and trust in management (Treviño & Bies, 1997).

This is not to suggest that an examination of such relationships is misguided or morally wrong. To the contrary, for what I am suggesting is that, as we conduct such research, we live up to our *moral* responsibility as scholars to question how our efforts may unwittingly contribute to dehumanizing or exploitative—that is, unjust—management practices. Indeed, I would hope most, if not all, of us would be horrified that our research findings would be used to legitimate management practices that perpetuate, rather than ameliorate, injustice in the workplace.

Linda Treviño and I have "nailed" a normative manifesto to the doors of the Academy (Treviño & Bies, 1997). In this manifesto, we describe—and decry—the instrumental orientation and ideology that permeate so much of theory and research that has put us, as justice scholars, in the role of apologists and excuse-makers for management. In particular, we argue that our research has silenced or excluded the voices of a large group of people in organizations—those who are relatively powerless.

The suppression of these voices follows from prevailing ideology of management theory and practice: the *organizational imperative* (Scott & Hart, 1979), which is based on a primary and absolute proposition: "Whatever is good for the individual can only come from the modern organization" (p. 43), and the related secondary proposition: "Therefore, all behavior must enhance the health of such organizations" (p. 43). Indeed, as Scott and Hart conclude, "the organizational imperative is the sine qua non of management theory and practice . . . the metaphysic of management: absolute and immutable" (p. 46). In other words, the core assumptions of modern management theory are totalitarian.

To counteract the ideological bias of the organizational imperative, Treviño and I endorse the *individual imperative* proposed by Scott and Hart (1979). According to Scott and Hart, "the primary proposition of

the individual imperative is: All individuals have the natural *right* (emphasis added) to realize their potentials through the stages of their lives. It thus follows that the primary purpose of any organization, public or private, is to allow for the realization of individual potentials" (p. 53).

If we take the individual imperative seriously, research on organizational justice should not only focus on advancing the interests of the managerial elite in organizations. In addition, our research should advance the interests of freedom and the dignity of individuals in organizations. If we adopt the latter agenda, it will not be "safe travels" at all times, particularly for those of us in business schools. For, if we assume that individuals possess certain innate and inalienable rights that we ascribe to them because they are human beings, such a perspective would be, indeed, quite "radical." Indeed, for those of us who adopt this radical view, our role will be that of a social critic: on the margin, not in the mainstream, motivated by what Beaney (1966) calls "a never-ending quest to increase the respect of all . . . for the essential values of human life" (p. 271). It is to this quest that I invite one and all.

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